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ABSTRACT

There are several recommended strategies for speech communication departments to help ensure their central role in the developing general education programs at community colleges. Although based on the experiences of one community college, the suggestions are generic in nature and can apply to many different college circumstances. Department members should (1) join the general education committee or task force, (2) collect evidence for arguments favoring speech in the general education curriculum, (3) seek interdisciplinary support and cooperation, (4) defend legitimate viewpoints in other desciplines, (5) volunteer the speech department for pilot testing of courses, and (6) involve the entire college faculty in the general education development process. A commitment to these strategies can keep the process a college-centered effort rather than a politically motivated or interdepartmental battleground. It will also ensure the place of speech communication as part of the "core that holds." (HTH)

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Speech Communication in the General Education Curriculum

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Speech Communication in the General Education Curriculum

In 1983 the American Association for Higher Education published an article by K. Patricia Cross, in which she announced a breakthrough in higher education. She began with this declaration:

> At least one college, I believe, is on the verge of achieving a breakthrough in pursuing quality in education without sacrificing open access. . . . the program I refer to is under development at the fifth largest institution of higher education in the nation. . . .[1]

Dr. Cross was not referring to an Ivy-league university or a sprawling Big Ten institution. The object of her attention and praise was Miami-Dade Community College and its restructuring of General Education. With the publication of Miami-Dade's record of the General Education effort in General Education in a Changing Society,[2] countless colleges have used the Miami-Dade experience as a model. Not to be outdone by the success in Florida, Prince George's Community College (Largo, Maryland) created, in August of 1981, a Task Force to investigate the College's Basic Education Requirements. Whereas the Miami-Dade program took three long years to develop, the Prince George's program may take twice that long. As a member of the Prince George's Task Force, this writer had the opportunity to participate in the complex process of re-examining old requirements and proposing new ones for a General Education curriculum. Equally important, the Speech Department's goal of including

Speech Communication as a vital component in the core of that curriculum was realized.

This paper, then, is not an attempt to document the move toward General Education in higher education. That move is underway and only the fainthearted or naive will fail to see its importance in ensuring the academic integrity and survival of a college department and/or institutions. Also, this is not a paper documenting what proved to be a highly successful model for developing General Education requirements at Prince George's Community College. Rather, this paper will attempt to outline suggested strategies for Speech Communication Departments to help ensure their central role in the development of a General Education program.

Background

Before moving to specific strategies, it is necessary to understand the basis for the development of the General Education program at Prince George's Community College. Two crucial components were (1) the development of a definition of General Education, and (2) the creation of a three-level hierarchy of goals for General Education. In drafting both of these documents, "the Task Force was careful not to rely on traditional academic disciplines as an organizing principle" believing "such an approach would be counterproductive."[3] This orientation benefited the Speech Department

by opening the process and Task Force to new ideas and philosophies.

The definition of General Education at Prince George's Community College resulted from an extensive literature search and extended faculty discussion.

> General Education is a common body of knowledge, skills and values to which all Associate degree-seeking students, both part-time and full-time, should be exposed, and for which Prince George's Community College may determine certain levels of competency. This common learning experience should enable students to think and communicate intelligently and critically, thereby equipping them for rational decision making in an increasingly complex society.[4]

This definition was later expanded by a list of more specific characterizations of General Education.

The second major document was the drafting of a three-level hierarchy of General Education components. Most basic were the "Basic Academic Skills" including Writing, Reading, Mathematical, Observational, Learning, Speaking, Listening, Interpersonal Communication, and Reasoning Skills. The second level was "Categories of Knowledge" divided into Political/Social, Cultural, Economic, and Physical World/Technology areas. The third level was "Values." The Task force believed that ". . . the role of education, at its best, (is) to engage the student as a whole person, and to encourage him to grapple with his choices, their consequences, and the notion of individual responsibility that naturally accompanies independent thinking and resultant behavior."[5] Values were divided into Intellectual Values (e.g., regard for precision and

clarity in the expression and communication of ideas) and Social Values (e.g., tolerance and understanding of other cultures). These two components--the definition of General Education and the three-level hierarchy--became the basis of the General Education curriculum at Prince George's Community College.

Strategies for Including Speech Communication

As obvious as the following suggestions may appear, they require both a concerted departmental effort and well-planned strategies for implementation if they are to benefit a Speech Communication department. Developing a General Education curriculum is not an easy task at any college. With many departments competing for the few available curriculum "slots" it is only a naive department that trusts its future to the good will of others. It should be a task of the highest priority because it can guarantee the placement of Speech Communication at the core of the collegiate curriculum.

The following suggestions are generic in nature and can apply to many different college circumstances. The examples, of necessity, are taken from the writer's experience at Prince George's Community College.

1. Get on the Task Force/Committee

If members of your department have not already become valued contributers to the college community and

sought-after participants on important college committees, you may have already lost the battle. Because of the significant impact of General Education on the curriculum of a college, Task Force members are usually chosen with great care. After years of inactivity or uninspired participation, it will be too late to emerge from the woodwork and play a central role on such an important college-wide assembly. Long-term and active participation in the affairs of the college are your best guarantee for inclusion on General Education committees and/or Task Forces.

2. Collect Evidence for Your Arguments

Although there are Speech Communication Association and professional Speech journal articles discussing the value and importance of Speech Communication, it is essential to collect documentation from a greater range of respected sources. Total reliance on Speech discipline documentation can be dismissed as biased. There were five different types of documentation that helped bolster the argument for including Speech Communication in the General Education curriculum at Prince George's: (1) literature on General Education in higher education,[6] (2) General Education literature addressing the needs of the community college,[7] (3) General Education models produced by other colleges and states,[8] (4) literature attesting to the importance of Speech Communication written in disciplines other than Speech,[9] and (5) literature published by Speech

Communication sources.[10] Selected examples of each type of literature are listed in the notes at the end of this paper. In addition to the above resources, the Speech Communication Association, upon request, will send a series of articles from non-Speech sources that can be a valuable second-line of defense in establishing the centrality of Speech to academic competence and excellence. Unfortunately, no single Speech Communication Association document summarizes these crucial resources in a single article. The result of deluging the General Education Task Force at Prince George's with a wide variety of articles was the inclusion of Speaking, Listening, Interpersonal Communication, and Reasoning as four of the nine Basic Skills in the General Education curriculum.

3. Seek Interdisciplinary Support and Cooperation

Rather than going it alone, there are natural disciplinary allies for Speech Communication. For example, the faculty in the Social Sciences departments allied with Speech at Prince George's to ensure the addition of Interpersonal Communication skills as part of the Basic Skills list. If there had not been a history of respect and cooperation between these two areas, such an outcome may not have emerged. In another example, the Philosophy Department worked cooperatively with Speech to develop a list of sub-skills in the Reasoning category. Reasoning skills included (1) the ability to develop, present and defend

valid arguments, and (2) the ability to draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources. Such skills are routinely taught in the basic Argumentation and Debate course as well as in Philosophy. Had there been no cooperation between Social Sciences, Philosophy and Speech, many basic communication skills would have been excluded from the Basic Skills level.

4. Defend Legitimate Viewpoints in Other Disciplines

It is too easy to become solely involved in the interests of your own department and ignore the legitimate viewpoints of other areas. It is the ethical responsibility of a faculty member to defend and promote the rightful interests of other departments for the good of the College. Such support also can ensure reciprocal behavior from colleagues in other areas. For example, in developing sub-areas under the Cultural Category of Knowledge, support from other faculty members resulted in the inclusion of a sub-category of knowledge taught in both Intercultural Communication and Group Discussion courses: "To know how prevailing forms of social behavior influence the acceptance of individuals by groups and organizations." Another benefit of this suggestion is the increased level of respect and awareness developed for the Speech Communication area. As expert communicators, the support of a member of the Speech Department can help other faculty members articulate

concerns and overcome rhetorical barriers to their legitimate points of view.

5. Volunteer the Speech Department for Pilot Testing

If any sort of course pilot testing is suggested, as was the case at Prince George's, volunteer your department. This suggestion is based on the assumption that your courses are well-developed and can withstand the academic scrutiny of others not in Speech Communication. The Master Syllabus Objectives of the Speech 101 course were compared to the list of Skills, Categories of Knowledge, and Values developed by the Task Force. Such careful scrutiny not only better developed the Speech 101 outcomes, it ensured the inclusion of Speech courses at two levels of General Education course groupings.

> One grouping would include the skills courses, such as Speech 101, English 101, and the basic math courses. . . . Courses in the second grouping, such as Social Science offerings and more advanced Speech and English courses, might select the general education components more readily from the values and knowledge packages.[11]

As often as the Speech Department and Speech courses are mentioned in the final Report of the Task Force, it was not authored by a member of the Speech Department. Speech Communication became a central element in the Report because of its use as a pilot-tested course and because of its strong support by other discipline areas.

6. Involve the Entire College Faculty in the Process

At every stage of the process, keep the entire college faculty well informed. When the definition of General Education and its characterizations were developed, copies were sent to all faculty for comments, changes, and approval/disapproval. The development of Basic Skills, Categories of Knowledge, and Values followed the same publicizing procedure. In addition, the Math Department was asked to help develop the sub-skills under the Mathematical skills category. The Speech Department's task involved the review of sub-skills in Listening, Speaking, Reasoning, and Interpersonal Communication skills. The S.C.A.'s "Guidelines for Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates" proved helpful in this effort.[12] Unfortunately, no such document is available for two-year and/or four-year college graduates.

Working with faculty from other areas, the sub-categories of Cultural, Political/Social, and Economic Knowledge received significant input from the Speech Department. An item was never removed or added to "draft" status until the entire faculty was given a chance to examine the proposal and provide feedback. Every faculty orientation for three years included a segment devoted to the progress of the General Education Task Force. As a result, no one was taken by surprise or alarmed by the pervasiveness of Speech in the report. There was no uproar and little

criticism when the Report finally reached the President's desk for approval.

Conclusion

By following the above suggestions, the process of developing a general education program can become a college-centered effort rather than a politically-motivated or interdepartmental battleground. A firm commitment to the above strategies also can ensure the place of Speech Communication as part of the "core that holds." Careful research and planning can secure Speech Communication's rightful and legitimate place within the college's General Education curriculum.

NOTES

[1]K. Patricia Cross, "The Miami-Dade Breakthrough," Current Issues in Higher Education (1982-83), p. 12.

[2]Jeffrey D. Lukenbill and Robert H. McCabe, General Education in a Changing Society (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1978).

[3]Prince George's Community College Task Force on General Education Requirements, Report to the President (Largo, Maryland: Prince George's Community College, 26 July, 1983).

[4]Prince George's Community College Task Force on General Education Requirements, p. 10.

[5]Prince George's Community College Task Force on General Education Requirements, p. 22.

[6]See, for example: Ernest L. Boyer, "Quality and the Campus: The High School/College Connection," Current Issues in Higher Education 4 (1980), 6-12; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Missions of the College Curriculum (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977); Jerry G. Gaff, "General Education: Rethinking the Assumptions," Change (September, 1981), 3-36; Project on General Education Models, GEM Newsletter (Washington, D.C.: Project on General Education Models), Beginning in 1979, the Project has published several newsletters addressing current issues in General Education.; John C. Sawhill, "Curriculum Priorities of the '80's: Beyond Retrenchment," Current Issues in Higher Education 4 (1980), 13-22.

[7]See, for example: Arthur M. Cohen, ed. New Directions for Community Colleges: Shaping the Curriculum (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979), Four articles in the above publication deal, specifically, with General Education issues.; James F. Gollattscheck, "Liberal Education and the Community College," Liberal Education 62 (1977), 245-252; James Hudson and Ralph Smith, "Does General Education Have a Future?" Community College Review 4 (1976), 57-62; Lukenbill and McCabe, General Education in a Changing Society.

[8]See, for example: "Catonsville Community College, Avoiding the Potholes: 43 Strategies for Reforming General Education," Paper produced by the General Education Task Force, Catonsville Community College, Catonsville, Maryland; Lukenbill and McCabe, General Education in a Changing Society; Raymond Bud Zeuschner and Robert D. Kully, "Communication Competence: A Statewide Proposal and Campus Implementation," Paper presented at the 1980 Speech Communication Association Convention (New York City:

November15, 1980). In addition, "Education, Research and Development Notes," in S.C.A.'s Spectra often includes summaries of General Education requirements or state competencies developed by states and state speech associations.

[9]See, for example: The College Board, Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1983); National Center of Education Statistics, Course Offerings, Enrollments, and Curriculum Practices in Public Secondary Schools, 1972-1973 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1976); Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, Education Commission of the States, Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve our Nation's Schools (Washington, D.C.: Education Commission of the States, June, 1983).

[10]See, for example: Don M. Boileau, ed. "Education, Research, Development Notes," Spectra (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association), Almost every issue of Spectra contains notes about communication competencies and requirements being developed by state associations.; John Muchmore and Kathleen Galvin, "A Report of the Task Force on Career Competencies in Oral Communication Skills for Community College Students Seeking Immediate Entry into the Work Force," Communication Education 32 (1983), 207-220; Although none of the recent articles in Communication Education addressed the General Education issue directly, every issue discusses specific basic skill pedagogy. Volume 31, No. 1 devotes significant attention to the development and assessment of communication competencies. The "ERIC Report" in each issue often develops a specific area more fully, e.g., freedom of speech, listening, nonverbal, communication apprehension, curriculum materials in ERIC, and speech communication and other basic skills.

[11]Prince George's Community College Task Force on General Education Requirements, pp. 4-5.

[12]Speech Communication Association, Guidelines for Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association).